



ATHENS COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE

Jeff Maiden, P.E., P.S., Athens County Engineer

16000 Canaanville Road • Athens, Ohio 45701

Office (740) 593-5514 • Fax (740) 592-4616

February 4, 2021

Ms. Darla Miller
Deputy Director, ODOT District 10
Marietta, Ohio

Re: Athens CR 7- Johnson Road Intersection

Good Morning Deputy Director Miller,

In phone conversations and emails dating back to the fall of 2019, I made it clear that I supported closing the (U.S. 33) median at the Johnson Road/ US 33 intersection. The closing of the center median would prohibit left turns onto Johnson Road from US 33 northbound; and prohibit left turns onto River Road (Athens Twp Rd 251) from US 33 southbound. The idea of making Johnson Road a dead end road and closing it completely at the US 33 intersection had never even occurred to me at that time.

I understand ODOT's long-term goal of eliminating all at-grade intersections on US 33 between Athens and Columbus, and nobody disputes that this is a worthy goal. However, I think there are many questions that have not been answered nor other options totally exhausted for this particular situation.

I sent you the attached letter from Paul Goodhue, P.E., PTOE (Professional Traffic Operations Engineer) almost one year ago. **In Mr. Goodhue's review letter, he concludes that the crash data alone does not justify the complete closure of Johnson Road** (i.e., the construction of a cul-de-sac at The Messenger). There are other obvious reasons related to the demographics of drivers that use the intersection; the direct exit from US 33 onto Johnson Road without a deceleration lane for speed transition; the direct entry onto US 33 without an acceleration lane for transition; and increasing speeds of southbound traffic. These issues can be solved without the complete closure of Johnson Road and making it a dead end road.

I concur with the State's findings and I do believe that the median needs to be closed as soon as possible. However, I believe a more comprehensive look at the entire situation needs to happen before Johnson Road is closed completely (*which might be appropriate at some point in the future related to the proposed US 33/SR 682 interchange improvements- see below*).

(1) There was a recent fatal crash at the US 33/ SR 682 intersection (*the at-grade intersection near the old Walt's bar location*) on May 27th, 2020. There were two people flown out via Med-flight to Columbus and one person pronounced dead at the scene. I distinctly remember a 17 year old woman killed there a few years ago. The 5/27/20 accident was not the first fatal accident there. Should the center median be completely closed at the US33/SR 682 at grade intersection to Chauncey? Should that entire intersection be closed? The SR 682/US 33 grade separation interchange into the Plains is only 0.7 miles south of the SR 682/US 33 at-grade intersection; and the Johnson Road/ US 33 intersection is another 1.3 miles south of there. The closure of any of these intersections will directly impact the others.

(2) There are more than 2000 vehicles per day turning right onto US 33 from Johnson Road. This is our busiest Athens County Road. If Johnson Road is closed at US 33, I believe that the majority of that traffic will be re-routed to the SR 682-US 33 interchange at the north end of The Plains. This could double the volume of daily traffic that uses the northbound access ramp to US 33. Can the interchange, in its current configuration, handle the additional Johnson Road traffic, as well as the SR 682/US 33 "at-grade" intersection traffic when it too is closed?

(3) The increased traffic at the SR 682/ US 33 interchange at the north end of The Plains will almost certainly make it more difficult for Dover Township residents to access their homes via Circle Drive (T1202) and Whispering Pines Drive (T662). Circle Drive outlets onto SR 682 between the two ramps at the south end of the interchange. Whispering Pines Drive (T662) outlets onto SR 682 at the north end of the interchange immediately adjacent to the exit ramp. Both of these Dover Township roads are the only point of access for the residents that live in those subdivisions.

Major improvements seem likely at the SR 682/US 33 interchange- perhaps rebuilding with two roundabouts needs to be considered like the District did so well at the US 33/SR 664 interchange in Hocking County. The needed improvements could include one roundabout at the north end of the interchange for Whispering Pines Drive, and one roundabout at the south end for Circle Drive.

Other factors to consider include:

(4) The Plains Elementary School will be vacated during summer 2021 and receive a full renovation and small addition. The building will reopen in later summer 2022 as a grade 4-6 building. The current student population is approximately 400 and come from the area immediately around The Plains and out towards Chauncey and Millfield. When it reopens there will be nearly 600 students from all over the District. This will definitely increase traffic coming from Athens to The Plains, however it would be difficult to estimate the magnitude.

(5) There are two businesses located on Johnson Road that would benefit from “right-turn-in” to Johnson Road and “right-turn-out” onto US 33 (Athens Messenger and Eclipse Company Town).

(6) There is a potential for a 300 acre development at some point (see Map). The land was cleared two years ago and there was discussion about a host of different possibilities. The planning for the design and construction of the new SR 682/US 33 interchange improvement project should include allowances for that development as well.

(7) There is a project planned to upgrade Elm Street from SR 682 into the Athens High School property. This is the main access road into Athens High School. I’m not sure how the construction of this project will be impacted by the complete closure of Johnson Road.

In conclusion, it seems like another possible sequence of events might look something like this:

(A) NEAR TERM (2021) Closure of Johnson Road/ US 33 median only and as soon as possible. Maybe a deceleration lane along US 33 south could be constructed for safer access for “right turn only” into Johnson Road (CR 7); and an acceleration lane added for safer access for “right turn only” from Johnson Road onto US 33 south toward Athens.

(B) NEAR TERM (2021) Closure of the SR 682/US 33 “at-grade intersection”, median only (at the old Walt’s Bar) and as soon as possible.

(C) (LONGER TERM) Consider the long-term operations of the existing interchange at SR 682/US 33 and perform a feasibility study with an alternative looking at Roundabouts at each end of a new bridge. The new bridge and interchange would be planned for increased traffic volumes from complete closures at Johnson Road/US 33; complete closure of the SR 682/US 33 “at-grade” intersection (Chauncey exit); access for new development; and

roundabouts for better access to Circle Drive (Dover TR 1202) and Whispering Pines (Dover T.R. 662) from SR 682.

After the interchange is completed, then consider the complete closure of the Johnson Road/ US 33 intersection, and the complete closure of the SR 682/US33 at grade intersection north of The Plains (Walt's Bar). There would certainly be plenty of data at that point to determine if our busiest Athens County road should become a dead end road.

Disclaimer: I am a County Engineer, not a Professional Traffic Operations Engineer (PTOE). So I asked Paul Goodhue (PTOE) to update his review from a year ago, and to consider the accidents at the "SR 682/US 33 at grade intersection" north of The Plains. I expect to have his updated review in my hands early next week.

I have questions- but I don't have the answers. I look forward to further dialogue about finding the "right" solutions to all of these issues.

Respectfully,



Jeff Maiden, P.E. P.S.
Athens County Engineer

Cc: Lenny Eliason
Chris Chmiel
Charlie Adkins
Supt. Tom Gibbs